

VZCZCXRO6185
OO RUEHCN RUEHGH RUEHMR RUEHPA RUEHRN RUEHVC
DE RUEHBJ #3169/01 3051144
ZNY CCCCC ZZH
O 011144Z NOV 06
FM AMEMBASSY BEIJING
TO RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC IMMEDIATE 1420
INFO RUEHZO/AFRICAN UNION COLLECTIVE
RUEHOO/CHINA POSTS COLLECTIVE
RUEHLO/AMEMBASSY LONDON 2993
RUEHFR/AMEMBASSY PARIS 3964

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 BEIJING 023169

SIPDIS

SIPDIS

STATE PLEASE PASS AF, EAP/CM AND INR (GILLES)

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/01/2031

TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [AGOA](#) [ECON](#) [EAID](#) [CH](#)

SUBJECT: PRC/AFRICA: BEIJING DECKS ITSELF OUT TO WELCOME
AFRICAN LEADERS

REF: A. BEIJING 22370

[1](#)B. BEIJING 22919

Classified By: Acting Political Section Internal Unit Chief Chris Klein
. Reasons 1.4 (b/d).

Summary

[1](#)1. (C) Beijing is rolling out a dramatic welcome for participants in the November 3-5 Forum on China Africa Cooperation (FOCAC). Bright billboards, signs and installations with an African flavor festoon the city's main street. Authorities have beefed up security and will enforce special rules limiting vehicle traffic in the capital during the event. The media has given major play to the summit, although the Propaganda Department has issued strict guidelines banning reporting on China's energy interests in Africa, our contacts told us. This has left the editorial window open for little more than puff pieces. Nonetheless, Africa has been a hot topic in Internet chat rooms in recent days. End Summary.

"Myth and Miracles"

[1](#)2. (U) Colorful signs and installations touting the forum have proliferated around town over the past week with red silk lanterns, banners, flags, billboards and corporate-style displays appearing along major thoroughfares and at hotels and shopping centers. Much of the signage, depicting Africa's natural beauty and wildlife, comes with upbeat messages about China-Africa ties. One seemingly omnipresent billboard shows tribesmen and wild game above the caption "friendship, peace, cooperation and development," in English, French and Chinese. Another popular sign reads, "Africa: Land of Myth and Miracles." The pedestrian walkway at Wangfujing, a crowded centrally-located shopping venue, is lined with brightly colored photographic displays of every African country, complete with basic facts such as the name of the capital city, the population and the national language. At either end of Wangfujing, corporate-event style displays of African scenes have been erected. School dance troupes decked out in traditional Chinese costumes perform African dances with Chinese characteristics, which mostly appear to involve beating madly on Chinese drum sets.

Security Tight

13. (U) In an apparent practice run for the Olympics, the PRC and Beijing's Municipal Government have visibly tightened security for the summit, installing metal detectors in the lobbies of and increasing police presence at every major Beijing hotel hosting African delegations. Civilian volunteers mobilized to provide additional neighborhood security are visible in downtown crowds, although not in great numbers. Xinhua reported that 810,000 such volunteers have been deployed. The volunteers sport red armbands, which some Chinese netizens have cited as reminiscent of Red Guards during the Cultural Revolution.

Positive Press Play ...

14. (C) The press has been filled with articles with such titles as "Why are we cheering on our African brothers in such a way?" and its complement, "Why are our African brothers so supportive?" Some commentators have also employed the term "African buddies," using a popular Beijing slang expression, to describe people from the continent. Africa-related articles have been largely upbeat, focusing on the mutual benefits of Sino-Africa cooperation while refuting perceived Western criticisms. In particular, articles have taken pains to reject any suggestion that China's involvement in Africa smacks of neo-Colonialism or opportunism. Newspapers, including the Beijing Youth Daily and The Beijing News, have run special segments or are dedicating extra coverage to FOCAC. Andy Zhang, a reporter from the Beijing Daily, said his newspaper would attempt to interview two

BEIJING 00023169 002 OF 002

African Ambassadors per day during the summit. Positive statements from African officials about China have received major play in the media.

... Has Not Been Left to Chance

15. (C) The Propaganda Department has issued strict guidelines to the media about how to handle the Beijing Summit. During the dates surrounding the event, media outlets are prohibited from reporting on energy issues related to Africa or on Chinese investment in specific countries on the continent, said Zhou Qing'an (protect), a regular contributor of commentary on international relations to the Beijing News. China's energy and investment strategies are topics that could cast China's Africa involvement in an unflattering light. Zhou acknowledged that such limitations leave little else of substance that is worth writing about. Nonetheless, Zhou wrote a column for the Southern Metropolitan Daily advocating increased environmental protection cooperation. "It was the best I could do given the rules," he said.

16. (C) Victor Yuan (protect), president of the Horizon polling company and a longtime Embassy contact, remarked that his recent informal research about Chinese attitudes toward Africa are positive but fairly superficial. Individuals who remember the Mao era associate Africans (and Latin Americans and certain other Asians) with China's efforts to be a "beacon and advocate to the third world," Yuan said. In addition, everyone knew about apartheid in South Africa, he said. As such, a reservoir of goodwill exists. But average Chinese know little about current conditions in Africa (Zhang of the Beijing Daily separately agreed). China's interest in Africa's energy and natural resources do not influence perceptions, Yuan observed. In fact, most are

ignorant of these concerns. He said he recently conducted a survey asking Chinese people where they think the bulk of China's energy resources come from. Africa did not figure among the top responses. Most said Russia, Yuan related, even though China's oil supplies largely come from the Middle East. As for the summit, Yuan said most Beijing citizens he has spoken with are more concerned about the potential for traffic snarls than with larger geopolitical matters.

Internet Buzz

17. (C) Nonetheless, Africa has been a hot topic in Internet forums, with many posts commenting on the political aspects of Sino-African relations (Ref B). Some netizens have maintained that China must never forget that African countries supported the PRC's bid to obtain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. Others recalled PRC efforts to torpedo the G-4 UNSCR reform proposal that could have resulted in a permanent seat on the Council for an African country (and possibly Japan). One post urged China to strengthen relations with Africa in order to oppose the United States, Europe and Japan. Despite the generally positive views on the forum, a few netizens have questioned why China pours so much money and effort into support for Africa when China's own students need greater financial assistance. Another post questioned why China should support African countries that are corrupt, because China's largesse may not flow to its intended beneficiaries.

Randt